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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Peasants in crisis in India

Drought, crop failure, debts and land grabbing have caused a tremendous crisis among peasants in India. Farmers who are under distress because of the agrarian crisis are committing suicide. Since 1995 nearly 300,000 farmers in rural India have committed suicide by hanging themselves or by ingesting pesticides. The situation in Maharashtra state is especially dramatic with 60,000 suicides in the last 20 years. The suicide rate among Indian farmers is 47 percent higher than the national average. Each day, 41 farmers are committing suicide.

According to official Indian data about 52 percent of rural households are indebted. Farmers usually take out bank loans against land to buy seeds, fertilizer and irrigation equipment. Local money lenders often take the place of banks and boost interest rates, creating a debt-trap for the farmers relying on good weather and good crops to repay their loans. Many of these farmers are belonging to the discriminated indigenous Adivasi population.

Many people in rural areas in India are convinced that agriculture is no longer profitable. Every day some 2,035 Indian farmers are abandoning their job and seeking for jobs in the bigger cities. Some 70 percent of India's 1.2 billion people still are living in rural areas. An exodus of Indian farmers would cause tremendous harm and social problems. Indian human rights defenders and social movements are blaming the government for starting a war against peasants. Abusive new laws and development concepts are contributing to massive loss of land among Indian peasants. Due to pressure of social movements India had promulgated in December 2013 the "Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Ordinance (RFCLARR)". The ordinance provided some protection to farmers by demanding social impact assessment studies before any land acquisition. Furthermore no irrigated multi-cropped land should be acquired in order to prevent an exodus of peasants and a reduction of agriculture production. The agricultural system in India is suffering from low efficiency. Despite the fact that agriculture is the largest employment sector of the country, it only contributes with 13.7 percent to the Gross Domestic Product of India. The new government, coming to power in March 2014, has changed its priorities and is focusing very much on more development and industrial growth. They are interested in attracting more foreign capital and investment to modernize infrastructure. Land is crucial for this new strategy, but land is life for the peasants. The new government has amended RFCLARR to facilitate development and has reduced the protection of rural landowners. This enables the authorities to take the land of peasants in cases of national interest without their consent. Some experts have been blaming the government to start a war against peasants.

In February 2015 peasant organizations have organized massive demonstrations to create more awareness for the crisis in rural India. During five days some 5,000 indigenous Adivasi farmers and landless laborers of more than 12 states marched from Northern India to the capital New Delhi to highlight their plight. Some 200 social organizations supported this campaign for land rights.

But human rights defenders, protesting against the official land acquisition policy and the denial of basic rights for peasants, are facing massive threats. On June 30, 2015, two leading Indian indigenous land rights activists have been arrested by the police in Uttar Pradesh State. Mrs. Roma Mallik, General Secretary of All India Union Forest Working People (AIUFWP) and her deputy Mrs. Sukalo Gond were arrested and imprisoned for several months, just hours before they were scheduled to participate in a new national land rights campaign to protect the rights of indigenous peasants. This is only one example for many other arrests or threats by Indian security officials.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to urge the Government of India to ensure thetprotectinn protection of land rights of its peasants and to stop any harassment of land rights activists.
tthe protection of peasants and human rights activists.